



Sexual Minority Youth and Family Services of Connecticut

March 19, 2009

To: Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

Re: Regarding Support for HB 6452: An Act Concerning Discrimination

I am the Executive Director of True Colors, Inc. a state-wide non-profit agency dedicated to the needs and concerns of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth and those responsible for their health and well-being.

I am honored to have the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 6452: An Act Concerning Discrimination.

Over the last several years, and with critical leadership from this committee, same sex couples in Connecticut have experienced significant new levels of equality and affirmation. As a lesbian adult who works with LGBTI youth, I am grateful both personally and professionally for the social justice work this committee has undertaken.

At the same time, I am deeply concerned, in fact horrified by the experiences of the youth and adults among us who continue to be excluded from full participation as citizens of Connecticut. Over the last 15 years, I have born witness to the discrimination that transgender and gender variant youth and adults experience on a daily basis. HB 6452, if passed, offers these citizens a measure of protection that is sorely needed.

Youth across Connecticut who don't fit neatly inside the typical 'norms' of masculinity and femininity are routinely harassed, name-called, and subject to various levels of violence at school, abused by family members and the community at large at home, and if relegated to out-of-home care, are likely to be re-victimized once in the system.

Too many leave school without graduating, opt out of services that are abusive and culturally incompetent, and end up on the street, couch surfing, drifting through young adulthood with no place to go, and no one to turn to. This is tragic not only for them, but for our society as a whole. Who knows what human gifts have been lost, what talents wasted for lack of simple equal treatment under the law?

There are currently 26 transgender youth in out-of-home care in Connecticut that we know about. Unless these youth are appropriate for foster care, they are likely to be placed in shelters for extended periods of time, sent out of state (often unsuccessfully) or bounced from program to program.


In the last two weeks alone, I have received calls from three different social workers regarding the unmet needs of Transgender youth (2 of these youth were Nine years old, one has been in care since she was two and has been in literally DOZENS of placements!)

At the same time, youth who receive support and affirmation do incredibly well. I can tell you amazing success stories about youth who, with love and support, have not only survived but thrived.

I understand that changing the Law and codifying into statute the existing rulings from CHRO regarding sex and gender discrimination is only one part of what needs to happen to create a civil society in which all of its members are valued and affirmed. But, it is a critical step. Although touching people's hearts and minds takes time, changing their discriminatory behavior must happen immediately.

I strongly support the passage of HB 6452 and ask for your support as well!

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robin P. McHaelen".

Robin P. McHaelen, MSW
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